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AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF BEETHOVEN

By J. G. PROD'HOMME

THE present war—like all other wars, no doubt—is fertile in unexpected reflexes from the most widely separated fields; and not the least among the surprises of which it is so prodigal is the discovery of a letter written by Beethoven toward the end of his life, whose hitherto unpublished text *The Musical Quarterly* is now enabled to lay before its readers.

One might have supposed that all Beethoven's papers, musical and otherwise, his scores, musical sketches, correspondence, conversation-books, were known to the world since the publication of his complete works with their supplements, and the spoliation of his literary remains. But the pages of this letter, for many years in the safekeeping of a collector in Lyons, who had adopted as his device the "*scripta manent*" of the Latins, shows that choice documents may still be brought to light; circumstances quite foreign to their object attract them from their hiding-places to assume their legitimate position in public collections.

In the month of April, 1916, the courteous custodian of the archives of the Museum and the Library of the Opéra in Paris honored me by asking my opinion concerning the authenticity of a manuscript offered him as written by Beethoven himself, with a view to its purchase. As a matter of fact, this manuscript had impressed him at first glance as possessing all the characteristics of Beethoven's chirography; according to all appearances, it is an autograph, and an important autograph, of the Master's, for this document comprises no fewer than six quarto pages. We compared it with facsimiles of authentic autographs, which fully sustained our initial assumptions; an analysis of the subject-matter confirmed them at every point. But the letter is undated, and neither the point of departure nor the addressee is given. After deciphering the text—a sufficiently difficult operation when Beethoven is concerned—it became possible to establish the essential meaning of the epistle, which we present below, face to face with its translation, to the readers of *The Quarterly*,¹

¹ M. Banès, to whom we beg herewith to express our gratitude, was so kind as to authorize this double publication.

erhöhen in dieser Beziehung
zu unterstützen zu werden —
notwendigen Maßes das ich selbst
bei D. 106 und 107 nicht
besonders wohl bei mir
nicht spüre. Bei Aufzucht
soll ich auch immer dabei
zu sein sein —

helfen. Ich habe schon
von der Aufzucht. Größt-
weise sind 12 und nicht
abgegeben ist es das erste
Lebensjahr, das erste wird
das höchste. Anordnung
effektiv, D. y. Psychisch alle

followed by certain commentaries wherein we have attempted an interpretation of its content.

(Translation)

Erstaunlich werther!

(p. 1 r°.) Hier den Brief an den Vice dir. reiszer,—ich bitte mit aller Schonung u. Zurückhaltung wegen K. mit ihm zu sprechen, ich thue das meinige nach meiner Einsicht u. *Art* u. bin überzeugt, dasz endlich ein gewünschtes Resultat erreicht werden wird, wir haben noch keine Proben, dasz *irrende* durch neue (1 v°.) jrrthümer u. irrige Behandlung zurechtgewiesen würden—erkundigen sie sich doch noch gefälligst bey R., ob es ihm nicht beschwerlich fällt sich mit mir schriftl. zu besprechen, weil ich alsdann einmal selbst zu ihm kömen würde—Haszlinger wuszte schon gestern von der ent-sprung. Haushält. meine Schuld ist es nicht, übrigens ist so was nicht ohne Beyspiel, sonst würde nicht die polizeil. Verordnung existiren, d. h. sogleich allda (p. 2 r°.) anzugeben, um d. h. an Ort u. Stelle wieder zu schaffen, freylich bin ich es ja, denn [den?] es trifft denn kein Pflægmatikus bin ich ja, u. beym *Kriminal* werden ja erst die Ursachen Untersucht, die bey dem Menschen manches veranlassen können, nun Gott sey dank, so weit ist's noch nicht, aber sagt ihr, ich handle zu feurig, freylich, ich warte nicht am Strome, bis jemand ertrunken ist, nun mit der Haushält. gibt's wieder ein wiener-*gespasz*, mit der [?] Pr. [?] v. Vivenot wird's wohl eben so seyn, denn herzlosz seydt ihr alle, für Kastelli ist dieser Zufall gut in seine Bären (p. 2 v°.)—Wenn sie bey der Verein's Kanzley vorbegehen, ersuche ich demüthichst um 2 Bilete für Sonntag, ich bin zwar keine von den *Sonnen* des Verein's, aber ich befruchte doch den Musikal. Boden So, dasz manche mir dafür Dank wissen—nun lebt wohl, ich hoffe Veritas non odium parit—jukt's euch so kratzt

Astoundingly esteemed [Friend]!

Here is the letter to Vice-director Reiszer,—please speak with him with all forbearance and discretion about K., I shall do my part according to my judgment and in my *way*, and am convinced that a desirable result will finally be reached. We have no rehearsals yet, whereby the *erring* might be instructed through new errors and erroneous treatment—do me the kindness to inquire of R. whether he does not find it difficult to communicate with me in writing, for then I would come to him sometime myself—Haszlinger had already heard about the runaway housekeeper (eeper) yesterday; it is not my fault, besides, such things have happened before, otherwise the police-regulation would not be in existence, that is, to lodge information there immediately, so as to bring the housekeeper [?] back again. To be sure, it is I whom it hits, for I am no phlegmaticus, and in the *criminal* [court] they will begin by examining into the reasons which might move a person to certain actions. Well, God be praised, we haven't got to that yet; but do you say I act too hastily?—true enough, I don't wait by the river till some one is drowned. Now, as for the housekeeper (eeper), that's another Vienna *joke*; with Pr. v. Vivenot it's probably just the same, for you all are heartless; for Castelli, this incident is good into his bears [*untranslatable*].—When you pass the Society's office, I beg most humbly for two tickets for Sunday, true, I am not one of the Society's suns, but after all I fructify the musical soil *so*, that many are grateful to me for it. Now farewell, I hope that veritas non odium parit. If you itch, scratch yourselves. I beg you to let me at least know the result

euch—das Resultat von ihrer Unterredung bitte ich sie mir wenigstens bald mitzutheilen, da mir gemäsz dem Briefe an R., wie sie sehen werden, es zu wissen nöthig, bis ich einen [?] Menschen allhier mit Diogenes Laterne gefunden habe, bitte ich sie doch einiges mitleiden gegen mich zu äussern—

wie der
ihrer ihrige
Beethoven

of your interview soon, for according to the letter to R., as you will see, it is necessary for me to know it, until I have found somebody here with Diogenes' lantern, I pray you to show a little sympathy for me—

as
yours
ever
Beethoven.

(p. 3 r°.) Nachschrift

Von K. alles zu verschweig. ist unmöglich, wenn B. [?] nur nichts schon vom *Billard* spielen weiss.—Suchen zu erfahren—fein—ob er wirkl. 5 stund. Kollegien hat—wegen Schlemmer die höchste verschwiegenheit dem Hr. v. R. zu emphelen, ich habe *meine gute Ursache*—sie werden an den Hr. Vice direk. einen wirklichen Vice finden,—er soll ihnen nur angeben, warum man sich wegen einem ort für Karl durchaus bey einem Profeszor wenden soll? Die Messe laszen sie durchaus nicht in seinen Händen, dem Masziven [?] Vice—welche plage für mich, o Gott nur weit von hier weg!—dulden—iñer fort (p. 3 v°.)—Der weite weg in die Alleegasze von mir aus u. für jeden andern ist zu bemerken —

Vale et Fave

Sie können auch das Mädchen mitnehmen um die Mesze zu tragen ad libitum—ich werde morgen früh darum Schicken ad libitum—

Lesen sie den Brief
an R.

(p. 3 r°. in margin) 3 Monathe von November bis Ende Jenner sind voraus bezahlt ich will aber auch gern diese verlieren.—

Postscript

It is impossible to keep everything quiet about K.—if only H. [?] [or S.?] [or B.?] does not yet know anything about the *billiard*-playing.—Try to find out—fine—whether he really takes 5 hour. lectures—Concerning Schlemmer Herr v. R. should be cautioned to say nothing whatever. I have a *good reason*—In the Vice-Director you will find a real Vice,—let him tell you, anyhow, why one must positively address oneself to a Professor concerning a place for Karl? By no means leave the Mass in his hands, that massive Vice—what a worry for me, O God, only far away from here!—to suffer—for ever and ever—The long way to the Alleegasse from my house and for everybody else should be noted—

Vale et Fave

You might take the girl along to carry the Mass, ad libitum—I shall send for it to-morrow morning ad libitum—

Read the letter
to R.

(Marginal note) Three months, from November to the end of January, are paid in advance; but I am quite willing to lose these, too.

Text and translation once established, let us submit the observations which they have suggested to us.

The exclamatory address, "Erstaunlich Werther!" quite in Beethoven's style, should be collated with the beginnings of various letters dated in or near the year 1825, and addressed to Karl Holz, one of Beethoven's familiars during this final period.

[illegible]

[illegible]

For example, at the beginning of August, 1825, when writing to Holz (an inexhaustible source of witticisms for him), Beethoven thus apostrophizes him: "Werther? Holz!" the interrogation-point indicating doubt whether he should write Werther (masculine form) or Werthes (neuter) to agree with the word Holz (wood), which is neuter in German.

On the 24th of the same month, another letter (which we shall quote further on apropos of Castelli) also starts with an exclamation: "Bestes [neuter, this time] Mahagonyholz!" (Best Mahogany-Wood!) About this same time, and also in the year following, but now employing terms similar to that in the present autograph, he writes, "Werther Freund! Bester!" or "Ganz erstaunlich ungeschwefelter Bester!" The conjecture thus appears quite plausible, that our letter was addressed to Holz circa 1825, a date which the following remarks will only serve to confirm.

Beethoven sends his correspondent a letter for a certain Mr. Reischer, "Vice-director," whom he frequently miscalled "Reiszig," as the passage crossed out in the second line shows. The said Reischer was, in fact, the vice-director of the Polytechnic Institute attended by Karl van Beethoven, the nephew whose guardian the composer had been since his brother's death, and whose bringing up occasioned him such grave concern until the end of his life. The "Description of Vienna" (*Beschreibung Wiens*) published by the Viennese historian Pezzl in 1824, devotes a few lines to Reischer and the establishment over which he presided: "The *Realschule* is managed by a Vice-Director, at present Herr Franz de Paula Reischer (also favorably known as an author), aided by three extraordinary teachers of the Latin, Bohemian and English languages. [Page 297.] It was after failure to pass examinations that Karl had been sent to this Institute in order to prepare himself for a mercantile career. According to Schindler, he entered in the autumn of 1825—rightly rectified by Thayer¹ to "the spring of 1825."

Vice-director Reischer was a great admirer of Beethoven, and the latter did not neglect either to write him, or to pay him frequent visits, with regard to his "dear rascal." A letter dated "Baden, June 9, 1825," and addressed to Karl, commences thus: "I have written Mr. v. Reiszig" Karl boarded in close proximity to the Institute with a certain Schlemmer (who should not be confounded with an earlier copyist of Beethoven's, who had

¹See Thayer-Riemann, "Beethovens Leben," vol. v, p. 214.

died in 1823), living in the Alleegasse No. 72, near the Karlskirche.¹ While Beethoven was in Baden, a summer-resort of which he was especially fond, Karl used to visit him during vacation-time and on holidays. This Schlemmer will reappear in the Post-script of our autograph.

In this opening paragraph, Beethoven evidently alludes to some prank of his nephew's, whom he endeavored, by every expedient, to keep in the path of virtue.

The second paragraph refers to one of those domestic embarrassments to which Beethoven was subject; Haslinger, the well-known publisher, was informed concerning this story of the housekeeper whom (probably) the Master's irascible humor—"I am nothing less than phlegmatic," he himself avows—had caused to flee without giving notice. But Beethoven does not mind being the victim of Viennese gossip, as was the fate of a certain lady, de Vivenot. Here there is an allusion, which we fail to understand, to some happenings in Vienna. Who was this lady, "Pr. v. Vivenot"? This French name occurs only once in Thayer's work (vol. v., p. 418) as the appellation of a physician mentioned in a conversation-book of near the end of 1826, who came to care for Beethoven in place of Dr. Wawruch. Dr. de Vivenot, born Dec. 25, 1764, ennobled ("Elder von Vivenot") in 1831, father and grandfather of Viennese physicians, had taken the degree of doctor in 1787; he had studied under the celebrated Van Swieten (the physician of Maria Theresa, and the father of the musical amateur who was the friend and protector of Beethoven and Haydn). In 1831 de Vivenot founded and carried on, at his own expense, a cholera hospital; he died two years later. Beethoven's abbreviation "Pr." probably stands for "Professoren." His remark refers to the wife of "Professor von Vivenot."

As for Castelli—or Kastelli, as Beethoven spells it—he is far better known. Ignaz Friedrich Castelli, who was born and died in Vienna, was one of the most prolific authors for the Austrian stage in the nineteenth century. The librettist of Weigl's *Schweizerfamilie*, and arranger of the book of Meyerbeer's *Huguenots*, he wrote and adapted for the Vienna theatres (more particularly after French authors) a considerable number of dramatic works. Can the "Bears" of Castelli, to which Beethoven alludes, have been some publication edited by himself, or a *pièce à succès*, a

¹ The Alleegasse runs past the Karlskirche, situated in the southern part of Vienna in the district (ward) of Wieden, near the left bank of the river Wien. Not far from this church there now stands the "k. und k. Technische Hochschule," which, we believe, succeeded the Polytechnic in the last century.

Highland

sort of local "review"? This is another question to which we can find no answer. Furthermore, we know that Castelli, who was "Hoftheaterdichter" (court-theatre poet) from 1811, edited the "Allgemeiner musikalischer Anzeiger" from 1819 to 1840, and was himself a good violinist. Beethoven's above-mentioned letter to Holz, dated Baden, Aug. 24, 1825, should be compared with ours; it begins as follows:

Bestes Mahagonyholz!
Federn sind uns nicht bekannt,
nehmt vorlieb.—Lachen erregte mir
Ihr Brief, ja ja Castelli musz dran.
Das Ding wird gedruckt und gestochen
zum Besten aller armen Teufel von
Musikalienhändler . . . "

Best Mahogany-Wood! Pens are
unknown to us, be content.—Your
letter made me laugh, yes yes, Ca-
stelli must do his part. The thing
shall be printed and engraved for
the benefit of all poor devils of music-
sellers. . .

Nohl, who reproduced it in his "Neue Briefe Beethovens," compares the above lines with a passage from Castelli's Memoirs (iii, 117):

The great Beethoven, every time that he saw me, would always ask: "What's the latest news in the line of monumental stupidities?"—Then I would repeat the latest *bons mots* and anecdotes, and he always laughed the more heartily, the scurrvier the tale. Whenever he wanted to perpetrate some tomfoolery, I had to help; and to prove it I refer you to a letter from Beethoven to his friend Holz, which has already been printed in the newspapers, and in which he tells him he intended to play a fine trick on the music-publisher Steiner, saying verbatim: "Castelli must be in on that!" (dabei musz Castelli herhalten!).

Who was this Vereius—for this word, twice repeated, cannot be read "Verein's," as we thought at first sight—of whom Beethoven requests two tickets for a Sunday performance?¹ Probably a director or secretary of the theatre, of whom "Beethovens Leben" makes no mention. Indeed, Beethoven adds with fine pride, and underscores with an energetic dash of the pen: "True, I am not one of Vereius suns, but after all I fructify the musical soil"

The letter closes with a reminder of the theme of the first paragraph, in which Beethoven begs his correspondent to communicate with R. (that is to say, Reiszer) concerning Karl.

When the letter is finished, at the very bottom of the fourth page, where the lines run closer and closer as the margin decreases, down to the signature, according to a procedure habitual with Beethoven, the latter, before posting it, felt a need (yet

¹ I agree with Dr. Baker that the words are indeed "Verein's Kanzley,"—Beethoven obviously meaning the office of a society whose musical soil he had fructified. Vereius as a proper name is most improbable.—Ed.

another habit of his, to which few exceptions are found) of summing it up, almost beginning it over again, in a postscript. At first of one page, finishing with a marginal note, this postscript is augmented by a second page, nervously scrawled with a bad pen that sputters on the paper.

In this postscript mention is first made of Karl and a certain B. [?] whom we have not been able to identify. As to Karl's billiard-playing, that is a matter only too familiar to us through various anecdotes, besides this fragment (*inter alia*) of a conversation between Beethoven and Karl Holz, jotted down in a conversation-book of the beginning of September, 1825:

I went to see Karl Sunday to give him the ticket (says Holz); it was evening, and I learned from the servant that he had gone out that morning, and had not come home once for meals. . . . I have tried taking him along with me to the beer-saloon, to see if he would drink much, but it seems to me that this is not the case. Now, I am going to invite him sometime to play billiards; then I shall see whether he is much out of practice. (Thayer, vol. v, page 518.)

Beethoven then inquires of his correspondent—and the notion strikes him as excellent, “fine”—to find out whether his nephew really takes five hours of lectures (*Kollegien*)—daily, probably. And here, too, we must compare the conversation-books with the present text. In the summer of 1825 (July or August) Beethoven, conversing with his nephew Karl, told him that he ought particularly to apply himself to penmanship, keeping accounts, and commercial work. “Besides (Karl adds), I must hear all the lectures.” (Thayer, v, p. 519.) Somewhat later (in November) he says: “The lectures begin to-morrow”; then (still in November, shortly after the concert given on the 6th, in which the Quartet in A minor—Op. 132—was performed for the first time) he adds: “To-morrow I have two lectures; they commence at 3 o'clock.” And on still another day he mentions that he has *Kollegien* from 9 to 12 and from 3 to 5, etc. (Thayer, v, p. 521.)

At about the same period Karl speaks one day of the wife of the aforesaid Schlemmer with whom he boards. He says that she had expressed a favorable opinion of the housekeeper, probably the very same mentioned by Beethoven in the body of his epistle, the flight of whom had so enraged him. (Thayer, v, p. 521.) Schlemmer, on his part (*ibid.*, p. 522), praises the punctuality of his boarder, who “goes out regularly every morning and comes home every evening.” These words, and the two lines in the margin of the first page of the postscript, complete each other,

and incline us to date this manuscript in November or, at the earliest, in the second half of October, 1825. Beethoven had, in fact, paid Karl's board at Schlemmer's for three months in advance, beginning precisely with November, and therefore not earlier than towards the end of October; but he undoubtedly distrusts Schlemmer, judging that his nephew is not kept within proper bounds there, for which reason he tries to find a boarding-place for the latter (saying nothing to Schlemmer, of course) "with a professor" possibly, even if he should lose the advance-payment for three months. However, Karl still remained with Schlemmer during the following year, until the attempt at suicide which filled the measure of Beethoven's "paternal" agonies and surely hastened his own end.

On the other hand, we know that Beethoven, on his return from Baden (Oct. 14, 1825), had taken up his abode in the house where he was to die:—the Schwarzspanierhaus (House of the Black Spaniards), formerly a monastery, in the Alsergrund "quarter," the present Ninth District or Ward of Vienna; while Schlemmer lived in the Alleegasse No. 12, quite near the Karlskirche, in the present District of Wieden, a fact which explains the first almost illegible lines on the sixth, and last, page of this long letter: "Der weite Weg in die Alleegasse . . . ist zu bemerken." Does this mean that the distance separating Schlemmer's domicile from the Schwarzspanierhaus had to be taken into consideration on account of Karl? This is probably the correct interpretation of these hardly legible lines; though their elliptic form renders the sense obscure.

Reiszer's Polytechnic Institute appears to have occupied the site of the present k. k. Technische Hochschule, in the near neighborhood of the Karlskirche, the k. k. Taubstummeninstitut (founded in 1779), and the Theresianum (the old Château de Favorite); to-day all these edifices still face the Alleegasse. The present Fourth District of Vienna, called the Wieden District, was at that time outside the walls of the old town, already overflowing its ancient ramparts, which were demolished in 1859 to make way for the Ring. Now, Beethoven lived at the opposite extremity of the city, likewise beyond the walls, in the vicinity of the Josephinum, an academy of medicine and surgery founded in 1784 by Joseph II. "Der weite Weg" (mentioned in our letter) from Wieden to Alsergrund, and forming the passage between these two eccentric districts, represents a distance of some two and one-half kilometers, or a trifle less than two English miles, when one follows the Kärntnerstrasse, the Herrengasse, and (to

leave the old town again at the north) the Schottengasse, into which the Schwarzschannergasse runs.

It is only in the concluding lines of the Nachschrift that we meet with an allusion to a musical work—a Mass—by Beethoven. This Mass, we opine, can not be the genial *Missa solemnis*, a contemporary of the Ninth Symphony, but most probably the Mass in C, Op. 86, composed in 1807, performed at the palace of Prince Esterházy in 1810, and sung at this very Karlskirche on the 18th of September, 1825. Smart, of London, who was then on a visit to Vienna, attended this latter performance. It is not unlikely that the score, or even the entire decidedly voluminous material, of this work had remained for several days in the custody of vice-director Reisz, after the production. Beethoven requests his correspondent, whom we suppose to have been Karl Holz, to bring it back to him, engaging the assistance *ad libitum* of a servant-girl.

This letter of nearly one hundred lines reflects all the thoughts engrossing Beethoven's attention at the time when we venture to fix its inception—the end of the year 1825—a time when, as we are aware, the composer was absorbed, to the hurt of music, in his "paternal" cares. His sorrows, alas, were not yet ended, although his end was drawing near. And although Holz writes, about the 1st of January, 1826; "I have already spoken with Reisz; he says that Karl conducts himself as one has a right to expect of a sensible man" (Thayer, v, p. 522), Karl, some weeks thereafter, was to attempt suicide in the environs of Vienna, adding a mortal pang to the agony which his unhappy "father" was already suffering.

Nevertheless, music was not absent from the Master's life during these tragic years, the years of the last Quartets, several of which were dedicated to Prince Galitzin, and one of them (Op. 131) to Field-Marshal Baron von Stutterheim, after the latter had received into his regiment Reisz's former pupil, who, renouncing his mercantile aspirations, had decided to take service in the Austrian army.

(Translated by Theodore Baker.)